

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 7, 2015

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Lynch:

President Obama has stated that sex trafficking is the modern equivalent of slavery. The websites that serve as forums for the buying, selling, and the sexual exploitation of children are essentially functioning as modern slave auctions. We ask your U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to immediately take necessary steps to investigate the nation's most active sex trafficking website, Backpage.com (Backpage), where an estimated 70% of the sex trafficking transactions are arranged, as well as Backpage's longtime owners Michael Lacey and Jim Larkin.

Sex traffickers act anonymously through websites purposely designed to hide the traffickers' activities and enable traffickers to annually exploit at least 100,000 American children. Among these victims approximately 80% are women and children who are bought, sold, and imprisoned in the traffickers' underground sex service industry. The on-line selling of sex with children is a national horror that must be confronted. In pursuing Backpage, Lacey, and Larkin, we hope DOJ will coordinate and utilize its full resources, including the FBI's field offices, the IRS Criminal Investigation Division, the DOJ Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, the Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs, and local law enforcement departments. Further, DOJ should investigate the circumstances surrounding Lacey's and Larkin's recent sale of Backpage to an undisclosed Dutch company.

As you undoubtedly are aware, Backpage, Lacey, and Larkin function in much the same manner as MyRedBook.com (MyRedBook). During June 2014 the FBI raided, seized, and shut down the California based sex trafficking website, MyRedBook, and charged its owner, Eric "Red" Omuro, with one count of interstate travel in the aid of a racketeering enterprise and twenty-four counts of money laundering. On December 11, 2014, DOJ secured its first federal conviction of a website operator for facilitation of prostitution when Omuro pleaded guilty to using the MyRedBook website to facilitate prostitution.

In his plea agreement Omuro admits how he used MyRedBook to facilitate prostitution. In all substantive ways Omuro's factual admissions about his use of MyRedbook apply equally and are parallel to how Lacey and Larkin use Backpage to facilitate prostitution. Therefore, because of these similarities, DOJ should pursue Backpage, Lacey, and Larkin as aggressively as it pursued MyRedBook and Omuro. Like Omuro, Lacey and Larkin have designed Backpage to facilitate and broker illegal commercial sex transactions through anonymous, on-line advertisements, including advertisements involving child sex trafficking victims. In short, Backpage is at the center of a thinly disguised prostitution network. Because of these similarities between MyRedBook and Backpage, we urge DOJ to pursue Backpage, Lacey, and Larkin in the same aggressive manner.

We look forward to your response on the actions DOJ is taking to investigate and pursue Backpage, Lacey, and Larkin to rid the U.S. of this modern day slavery.

Sincerely

Clara Kim

Richard Helber

Tom Cotts

Jim Wagon

Quinn Black

Marsha Blackburn

Paul Cochran